

## Testimony of Richard Stem

### Field hearing for the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Today I will be discussing issues/opportunities related to Land Management Practices of the U.S. Forest Service. The advances they have made here in Region 1, the on-going challenges of increasing the pace and scale of restoration and the detrimental effects of not increasing that pace. This would include effects to recreation, wildlife, soils, water quality and of course the resiliency of a future forest for future generations.

Current items that Region 1 has been doing to advance the pace. 1. Pods 2. Salvage effort (IMT) 3. Regional focus. 4. Engaging partners such as DNR and counties differently.

Current difficulties facing the Agency in advance of increasing the pace. 1. Lack of personnel capacity and hiring 2. CEQ regulations (40 yrs., current initiative). 3. Inconsistent NEPA approaches in terms of scale 4. Inconsistent public engagement (although getting much better).

Now that the fire funding issue has been fixed and will take place in 2020; the remaining large item on the screen is a budgetary and personnel large scale initiative to dramatically increase the pace of treatments across a large scale in the Rocky Mountains.

#### Opportunities:

A large scale initiative to look at a multi-year budgetary increase solely to increase the treatments on the land of the most dire need across Regions 1, 2, 4, and 5. A triaging by year based on priority and threat. This must be an “out of the box” approach for at least 4-6 years to deal with what has happened in the past 20 yrs. . . .

However;

1. It must be accompanied by immediate and a short term strategy of personnel capacity filling either by contracting, expedited hiring, and massive GNA projects supported by the States.
2. Proposed legislation should proceed forward with compelling arguments utilizing assistance from the Forest Service on decision support. Ensure that the legislation does not have unintended consequences.
3. Deal in a totally different and expedited way with challenges to projects.
4. Continue to engage the Forest Service (National Forest units and Regions) very actively and with different models of the past from all levels of partners including counties, state governments, federal agencies, and any other entities that are interested in solutions/results.
5. Continue to advise and council on the strategic and wise use of collaboratives and ensure they have standing in any disagreements on projects. Sanction them the authorities to expedite any initiatives on increasing the pace and scale of operations.
6. Currently the Agency is re-looking at NEPA, ESA, and other opportunities for efficiency. Called the EADM effort. This should be tracked, closely followed, and engaged in by all partners including Congress.